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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

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EUROPEAN DECORATIVE ARTS

Exhibition of Medals
From Renaissance Times in Italy
(1400-1600)

Department of European Decorative
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Exhibition of Medals

from Renaissance Times in Italy (1400-1600).

Metal disks with figures in relief on each side came into use in Italy during the fifteenth century as a form of personal memorial, and were called medals (metallum, metal). The use of such metal objects for purposes of commemoration was almost unknown to the classical world, and until lately modern art has produced no medals rivaling those of the Renaissance.

The medals of the Italian Renaissance were not struck but cast, and afterward perfected by chasing. Since they could be reproduced in numbers, they could be distributed to friends or to officials, or placed in corner-stones of buildings. In a manner they fulfilled the purposes of the personal photograph of today. The medal taught the men of the Renaissance, newly alive to their individual importance, one way in which man may "eternize himself", (Come l'uom s'eterna).

This case contains reproductions of some of the best Italian Renaissance medals. They are in sulphur and reproduce originals of bronze which exist in greater or less number in collections in Europe.

1. Giovanni II. Bentivoglio (1443-1509).

The Bentivoglio Family controlled Bologna until overthrown by the Pope in 1512. Giovanni was the last of his race to rule the city. He is here represented wearing long hair and the cap called the "berretto", a heavy gold chain about his neck. The inscription calls him: "The prince of Bolognese liberty."

By Sperandio of Mantua, about 1480.

2. Carlo Quirini.

Similar long hair, cap and dress.
By Sperandio of Mantua, latter half of 15th century.

3. Pietro Albani.

Similar dress.
By Sperandio of Mantua, latter half of 15th century.

4. Pico della Mirandola, philosopher and poet (1463-1494).

Bareheaded and wearing a cuirass. His discourse on the dignity of mankind has been called one of the noblest legacies of the Italian Renaissance.
By Niccolò Fiorentino, 1490: descendant of a family of goldsmiths; grand-nephew of Spinello Aretino, the follower of Giotto.

5. Lorenzo de' Medici (1448-1492).

The medal "gives the compressed, ugly features of the great statesman and patron of art, a heritage of his family, with a fidelity that borders on brutality."
By Niccolò di Forzore (1430-1514);

6. Reverse of the Medal of Isotta degli Atti (No. 16 in the case from the Fogg Museum).

The elephant, than a half-fabled animal from antiquity and the Far East, was a device used by her husband.
By Matteo de' Pasti (d. 1490?).

7. Giovanni de' Medici (1493-1526), called delle Bande Nere.

Giovanni was the last of the condottieri, or soldiers of fortune who had abounded in Italy. He took his name from the band of horsemen in black armor ("bande nere") at whose head he received his death-wound before Mantua.
The medal shows a stout figure with short hair and a Napoleonic cast of features. The inscription uses the Latin superlative "fortiss." to be translated "invincible".
By Francesco da Sangallo (1494-1576).

8. Alessandro de' Medici (1510-1537).

Son of the Lorenzo whose tomb by Michelangelo is reproduced in cast No. 157a. The wolf-like face

and coarse hair and beard correspond to his reputation. He was murdered in revenge for his tyranny by Lorenzino de' Medici, a dwarf. His body was thrown on top of that of his father in the sarcophagus that bears the figures of Evening and Dawn.

By Francesco da Sangallo (1494-1576).

9. Elena Marsuppini (1551).

Hair bound by a jewelled band. Dress cut low about the neck and showing a plaited chemise.

By F. da Sangallo (1494-1576).

10. (reverse) Florence; represented as a woman holding in one hand a branch and in the other a sphere with the inscription: Pax Libertasque Publica (Public peace and liberty).

By Michelozzo Michelozzi (1391-1472).

11. Emilia Pio (1495).

Wife of Antonio da Montefeltro. Funerary medal. The reverse shows a pyramid like the Franklin monument in the Granary Burying Ground. On the tip an urn. The inscription reads: Castis cineribus (to her chaste ashes). Her hair is in a very tight band elaborately wound with ribbons, and issues from a skull cap held by a cord around her forehead. Dress cut low in front. Necklace with stones at intervals.

By Adriano Fiorentino (d. 1499).

12. Giovanni Tornabuoni (1492?). Uncle of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

A principal street in Florence is named for the family. Face full of character; an evident likeness.

Florentine.

13. Bernardo del Barbigia (1453-1526).

Long hair, tunic close around neck. Some of the medals give the appearance of being almost half-heads in full relief. In fact, they are very much flattened, as can be seen by glancing along the surface.

Florentine, 1489.

14. Nonnina Strozzi (born 1465).

Cap tied under the chin, square-necked dress, necklace and chain supporting the medallion. The medal is cut with extreme delicacy.

Florentine, 1489 (?).

15. Giovanantonio Guidi (1459?-1501).

With cap (berretto), long hair and cuirass.
Florentine.

16. Giovanni da Stia.

Handsome and virile face; tunic close around the neck. On the reverse a figure representing Hope gazing toward the sun. The inscription reads: SPERO IN DIO (I hope in God). The ~~par~~ symbolism on the reverse of the medals has personal or family character, as we now put personal or family crests and mottoes on objects of use like carriages, books or letter-paper.
Florentine.

17. Alessandro Vecchietti.

The inscription gives his age as twenty-six years. Strong face, drooping nose and melancholy mouth. On the reverse, a female figure representing Fortune with the inscription: Death rather than disgrace (Prius mori qua turpari).
Florentine.

18. Pietro Aretino (1492-1557).

A satiric poet from Arezzo, near Florence. The inscription calls him "divine" (divus). He is heavily bearded and his thick hair is cut short. He has small, finely cut features, and wears an embroidered tunic and rich mantle. The reverse bears the inscription: VERITAS ODIUM PARIT. It is part of a line from the Roman poet Terence: "Truth begets hatred (and complacence friends)" - an inscription well suited to a satirist.
By Leone Leoni (1509-1590).

19. Girolamo da San Gemignano.

Naïve, youthful face, pouting lips, wide-open eyes, long hair under a cap.
Florentine.

20. Julia Astalia.

The inscription adds the compliment "Divine" (diva). A girlish figure and bearing. The end of her hair is drawn up and knotted with a fillet on top of the head.
B. Talpa (1484-1495);

21. René of Anjou (1409-1480), King of Jerusalem, Sicily, etc.

Portly person; grandmotherly face; wears a

close tunic with large buttons. A leather (?) cap with no hair showing under it. Small concave nose, protruding lips and double chin.
Pietro da Milano (1461-1485).

22. Geronimo Savonarola (1452-1498).

The famous preacher, hung and burned for his liberality of opinion. The hero of George Eliot's novel of Romola. He is represented in the Dominican dress with a hood. The inscription reads: "Brother Jerome Savonarola, of the Order, preaches." (F. Hieronimus Savonarola ordinis praedicat).
By two sons of Andrea della Robbia who entered the Monastery of San Marco at Florence as Fra Luca and Fra Ambrogio. They were ordained by Savonarola, to whom the Robbia Family were devoted, and made medals of him.

23. John Palaeologus.

Last ruler but one of the Eastern Empire before the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. He came to Ferrara in 1438 to implore aid against the Turks from the Church Council then assembled there. Pointed beard and hair and whiskers carefully cut; three long curls at the back of the head. Hat of remarkable shape. The name and titles are in Greek letters.
By V. Pisano (1380-1451). This is the earliest of the medals here reproduced. The artist was the creator of the Italian Renaissance medal.

24. Vittorino da Feltre.

The compliment of "Exalted" (summus) is added to his name. He was a much beloved preacher of the new Humanist Learning, and his delicate and gentle features bespeak his character.
By V. Pisano (1380-1451).

25. Constanza Bentivoglio.

Hair confined by a light cap continued down her neck. One escaped ringlet hangs against her cheek. A wholesome, coarsely cut face.
Andrea Guazzalotti, called Pratense, (1435-1495).

26. Girolamo Santucci of Urbino (died 1494).

Bishop of Fossombrone on the Adriatic Coast. Tonsure surrounded by thick, short hair; wrinkled face with large, strongly marked features with more good-nature than intelligence.
Andrea Guazzalotti, called Pratense, (1435-1495).